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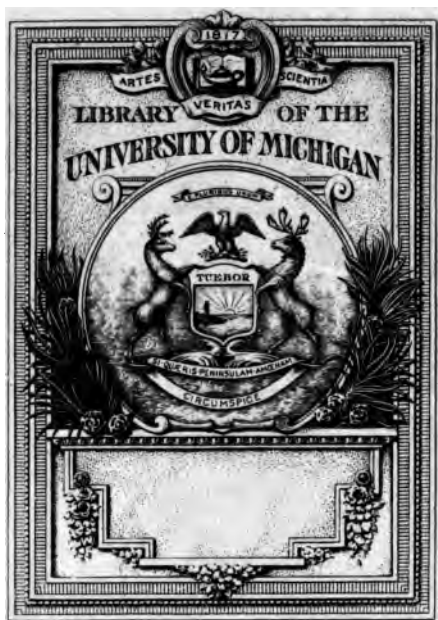
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Campbell: The Bibliographie of the Future.



THE
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE FUTURE

A Paper
Reviewing the existing Condition
of
National and International Bibliography
with
Suggested Reforms

BY

FRANK CAMPBELL

OF THE LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM

Read before the Annual Meeting
of the
Library Association,
Belfast, September, 1894

"We want a complete scheme of human life."

LONDON

1895



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Completed by Benbury Fitzgerald

The Bibliography of the Future.

THE subject of the paper which I offer for discussion to-day is that of "National Bibliography." And I make bold to believe that you will pardon the choice, firstly, in memory of the noble efforts made by this Association in the past in regard to this very subject; secondly, because encouragement of bibliographical research is, in reality, one of the purposes for which this Association was founded.

Moreover, I feel sure that a moment's reflection will show that the matter is one deserving of your most careful consideration, because, eventually, it affects the work of free public libraries very closely, as it does the work of every library in the country.

A Function of Public Libraries.

One of the most important functions of a large public library is not only to preserve and store books, not only to be able to supply individual books when asked for—but to be able at will to readily and surely supply the fullest information, up to date, relative to the existence of *collections* of works on particular subjects, irrespective of whether such books are at the time all actually in the library: and this, not only in regard to the literature of our own country, but of *all* countries, including especially our colonies; and not only in regard to past time, but having regard to *present* time.

Inability to Carry out the Same.

Now, gentlemen, you will not, I trust, misunderstand me when I say that, at the present moment, if we insert the short phrase, *complete up to date*, librarians are unable to afford this information, and this, not through any individual fault of theirs, but because the means do not exist such as will enable them to supply this want, nor do the means yet exist in any library in the world.

If, then, my statement be correct (and I wish most sincerely that you could prove it otherwise), we are face to face with a most serious and startling fact.

Importance of Bibliography still Unrecognised.

It is a truism to refer to the vital connection between literature and the progress of civilization ; but, as you know, it is often the most obvious truisms which are most difficult permanently to realise, and, therefore, to act upon. And I do most emphatically assert—and this in spite of all effort made in the past—that we do not yet *fully* realise what is the real connection between Bibliography and national progress.

How otherwise can we account for the condition of Bibliography such as we know it to be, to our cost ?

After the lapse of centuries, the science of Bibliography, regarded as a whole, is yet in its infancy, and the world's literature continues in disorder. The Press continues to pour forth its tons of books, but we have no mill to digest them ; our machinery is antiquated and useless ; or, to be more correct, for the more intricate work we have never had anything worthy of the name of machinery. To borrow an idea, we still continue to plough with the spade and reap with the sickle. And, to make matters worse, every day, nay, every hour, the situation grows more serious.

Some may think I exaggerate. Let me, then, seek to prove my assertions.

The Aims of "Bibliography."

On a previous occasion, in a paper read before this Association, I attempted to define the word Bibliography. It is unnecessary for me to repeat that definition now. But it is necessary for me to state what I conceive to be the aim of Bibliography, in order to establish a standard of comparison.

I imagine, then, that the final aim of Bibliography is: To enable every person, in every country, to derive the fullest possible use and enjoyment from all the books of every country, for all time, and on every subject.

Essentials of Bibliography.

And that this object may be fulfilled, there is one grand essential, viz., that Bibliography should be complete. "Bibliography is only useful when it is complete" wrote Renan, and a truer statement does not exist—*Completeness*, identical with *certainty*, as involved in and contributed to by *definiteness* and *continuity of place, subject and time*, so as to include every work (in whatever form issued), of every author, on every subject, at

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any time, in every country, as attained by co-operative individuality or centralisation, and individual co-operation or de-centralisation, at all times working forwards from the unit to the aggregate.

It is impossible to exaggerate the paramount importance of this element of *certainty*. There is no price too high to pay for it. To be able to say of the reference works you hold in your hands, that they contain a *complete* list of the works of that *country*; of the works of that *author*; of the works of that *period*; of the works on that *subject*—this is the ideal state of bibliography to be aimed at, and we ought not to be satisfied with less.

Essentials of Bibliography not Fulfilled.

What do we find, however? The reverse in all directions. Alas, the characteristics of Bibliography, as we know it, are those of incompleteness, of uncertainty, indefiniteness of country, confusion of subject, vagueness of time.

This is the feature of the *majority* of "*Special Bibliographies*," that, being in the first instance incomplete, they overlap one another; omitting to cover their own ground, they poach on their neighbour's preserves; referring to indefinite areas of time, place, subject, it is impossible to know what they include or exclude; even if accurate, now too discursive, now too concise; even if of value, ceasing to be continued, or sold at a prohibitive price; compiled on a hundred different systems, with a hundred different aims, we cannot understand their arrangement; in fine, *we never know where we are*, and can only stand and stare in blank bewilderment.

If you want a complete record of the literature of this country, you cannot get it—as is well known.

If you desire a complete record of the literature of any country in the world, you cannot get it.

There does not exist a record of the modern literature of any country, even for any one year, which is *bibliographically* complete.

If you wish for complete Special Lists (quick up to date) of all the works issued in this or any other country on important subjects of the day, such as Education, Agriculture, Art, Theology, Medical Science, Socialism, you ask for an impossibility.

And in spite of the existence of masses of Official Documents in all directions, not a catalogue exists of the documents of any country on the map.

Now please let it be understood, I am not for one moment unmindful of the existence of the great monuments of Bibliographical industry of the past. But I am here to-day not to praise but to criticise. And in reference to the finest work of the past, consider, gentlemen, at what a cost of life-blood, energy, intellect, time and money they have been produced, such as may well make us weep. And all unnecessary.

The Causes of Disorder.

Whence then the cause?

The cause is obvious, viz., the total want of system consequent on the absence of organised investigation of the theory of Bibliography, and the lack of means for enabling such researches to be carried out. We expect the work to evolve itself without the aid of money, men and effort.

National Book-Registration.

If we look around for facts, the lack of system is most conspicuous by the absence of National Registration of Books, which Registration is alone the true basis of all Bibliography.

In the moment when a complete record of books may most easily be secured at a minimum cost of time, labour and expense, we allow them to disperse *without making that record*. And it is only years afterwards that efforts are made by isolated individuals, all working on different systems, to try and partially remedy the evil by endeavours to recollect at great cost of energy, a record of the books allowed to be dispersed; and when this is done, such collections, known as "Special Bibliographies," are *never* complete.

Fallacy re "Selection."

In connection with the subject of Registration, it is necessary for me here to refer to an objection which is constantly being made that Registration is undesirable because it would involve the cataloguing of so much "rubbish." We *must* meet this objection, for there is no idea which deprives the cause of so much support at the present moment as this fallacy.

Let me first frankly recognise the fact that there *is* rubbish, and also a great deal of it which would necessarily have to be registered. We all deplore it! But there the matter ends. There is no possible escape from the difficulty. In the Free Public Libraries, with limited supply of space, books, funds and

restricted functions, it is possible—nay, absolutely necessary—to exercise a most stringent selection in the works to be purchased. But when it is a matter of the Record of *National Bibliography*, the great essential of which is completeness, you cannot avoid the evil, otherwise the idea of *National Bibliography* is at once destroyed.

And supposing that you attempted the task of selection prior to Registry, the result must be futile.

No two men will ever be found who could conscientiously agree on any fixed principle of selection, for the simple reason that no absolute standard of comparison exists. What is of value to one is useless to another; what is worthless at one time is valuable at another. In a large collection of books it becomes purely an arbitrary matter, dependent on the personal tastes or prejudices of the individual. And the principles acted upon by one are just as likely to be reversed by another.

In fine, the principle of selection will always be a door of escape not only for the bad, but also for the good works.

As a matter of fact, the principle of careful selection, exercised on a large scale, means an expenditure of time and labour on the part of a staff of specialists which in the end would be most serious, and it would invariably lead to many of the rejected, and therefore lost works being purchased in after years, when out of print, by the several libraries at exorbitant prices.

Can we measure the untold loss of time, money, health and intellect that has been spent (alas, all too contentedly) by bibliographers in recovering *lost books*? It is impossible to help contrasting the anxiety shown for the discovery of lost pages of past history compared with the comparative indifference shown for the preservation of the pages of present and future history. And remember that the work must eventually be done by someone.

In the one case it will be performed by trained experts, working together under the very best conditions, at a minimum cost of money, time and labour, and with comparatively perfect results—done *completely once and for ever*.

In the other case the work will be attempted over and over again for years to come by untrained hands, who will waste, not only their own time, but what is more important—the time of us librarians—in futile attempts to recover lost records; and if private individuals endeavour to make good the lack of public enterprise, such attempts will generally result in bibliographical work which will violate all the chief essentials which we have already considered.

Mr. Panizzi went to the root of the matter when he stated that "you cannot have a large library and a short catalogue, nor a long catalogue and a short index"; and, in extension of the same truth, it is contrary to all the dictates of reason that we should have a large National Literature and rest content with a stunted record of it.

Periodical Special Bibliographies.

Again (alluding to a matter which is dependent on National Book Registration), it has never yet been fully recognised that one of the great wants of the day in the world of literature is a *complete system* of Special Bibliographies to cover the whole range of English Literature at home, and this quite apart from the necessity of "Selected Subject-Catalogues" and "Indexes of Matters."

It has never been sufficiently recognised that Special Bibliographies as a class, as we know them, are an intolerable nuisance, and a species of bibliographical hypocrisy, because they make believe to satisfy wants which they do not satisfy, and which, under existing conditions, they can never satisfy.

Nor has it yet been conceded that the work of compiling Special Bibliographies should be performed by the State, on *one continuous system*, instead of being left to the mercy of chance bibliographers.

And in connection with such a system, it remains to be recognised that the actual work of compiling Special Bibliographies is a work which should precede all other catalogue work.

According to present traditions, if we attempt the work at all, we catalogue books first and re-catalogue them in Special Bibliographies afterwards. We should adopt exactly the reverse method, for by striking out the extra descriptive matter in a bibliographical title, the slip is ready for the printer of the ordinary catalogue-titles, without the necessity for a second examination of the book, whereas according to present methods a book has always to be examined and catalogued twice, thus necessitating exactly double the work.

And similarly, as Mr. Winter Jones pointed out in the course of his Inaugural Address to the London Conference of Librarians, in 1877, the titles for an Index of Matters should be written at the moment when a book is first examined for cataloguing purposes (thus saving the necessity for a *third* examination of a book).

In short, to perform all the bibliographical work ever needed in connection with a book, *simultaneously*, avoids not only the necessity for subsequent re-examinations, but also the necessity for the repeated moving of the books of a whole library to and from the librarians' tables.

And, be it observed, what is of infinite importance, that in regard to the system of National Book-Registration and National Special Bibliographies compilation, if the work be done properly once and for all, there will be no need for modern literature ever to be catalogued again in manuscript. For all that librarians will have to do is to cut the titles out of the National Periodical Lists, and incorporate them with their other accessions ready for the printer. And if provincial libraries require abbreviated titles, well, it would be the easiest thing in the world to supply special Periodical Lists with Titles abbreviated in conformity with the wants of free public libraries.

In regard to this last point I speak a little theoretically without actual practical experience of the working of such a theory, and therefore I must leave it for those present afterwards to say whether they think the idea would be eventually saving of time.

Finally, if we may place faith in the technical possibilities of the scheme propounded by Mr. William Cooley, Secretary to the Hakluyt Society, before the British Museum Commission in 1849 (and I confess on a brief examination his general views, as expanded in the *Athenæum* of 1850, appear to me to be most masterly), the bibliographical facilities afforded by cutting up pages of stereotyped titles seem boundless.

Fallacy re Impossibility of Classification.

It is necessary here to refer to the old-fashioned argument that Bibliographers can never agree together on any one system of Classification. For this is one of the most deadly arguments brought against the idea of a system of Special Bibliographies, and one which I trust we shall trample under foot.

Of course we shall never agree to any *detailed* systems of Classification. Mr. Panizzi clearly demonstrated in the year 1849, that wherever science is involved, in accordance with the fresh increase of scientific knowledge year by year, all *detailed* classification of scientific Class-Catalogues will periodically become obsolete and therefore most troublesome, if not altogether useless.

But this objection does not apply to the use of broad, well-defined groups of sub-classification, such, for instance, as is in vogue for purposes of shelf-placing in the free public libraries.

And there is good reason to suppose that when once a system of *Broad-group* Bibliographies is well started, that it will be found easily possible to use the same materials for purposes of sub-group classification, by the issue of a large number of smaller Bibliographies required.

However this may be, one thing is very certain, that people *will* have Special Bibliographies, whatever we may say, because they supply a legitimate want.

We may, therefore, just as well take the matter seriously in hand and see that it is done properly once and for ever, instead of allowing it to be done badly. And on this head be it remembered that the curse of bad work does not always end with itself, but often not only delays but actually prohibits the work from ever being properly carried out.

Division of Stream of Literature.

I have now referred to several matters of great moment, but I have not even yet mentioned one of the most serious defects in Bibliography. I allude to the evils resulting from the division of the stream of Bibliography into several channels.

And so important is this matter, that although I have remarked on the subject on a previous occasion, I will again ask your most earnest attention to this part of my paper.

To put the matter bluntly, we have stumbled over the meaning of the word *book*! We have allowed the traditional significance of the word to interfere with its true bibliographical sense. What is a book?

Six men write six works upon Agricultural Science.

1. One publishes his work separately, and men call it a "book."
2. The second work is buried in a "Collected Works" series, which is generally provided for by one vague title.
3. The third appears through the medium of a learned society journal, and it is called an "article."
4. The fourth appears also as an "article" in a magazine of the day.
5. The fifth appears as a contribution to a National Encyclopædia.
6. The sixth appears by instalments in an enterprising newspaper.

Possibly the separately-issued book is the shortest, often the most worthless of the six works. But traditionally it is a "book," and therefore has a full-entry title assigned to it, in most of the catalogues of the world.

The five remaining works are considered to be "only articles," and victimised as such; therefore, except in the instance of certain catalogues, they are deemed unfit for further notice, and soon become comparatively lost to the world.

A kind Bibliographer may occasionally hunt them out and insert them in his Special Bibliography. (He probably will fail to come across them.) They will not be entered in an *Authors' Catalogue* because they are "articles." For the same reason they will be excluded from Subject-Catalogues.

And it is only due to unrequited private enterprise that they will be *indexed* (necessarily with abbreviated titles).

Now this is all wrong. And to sum up the excuses urged in the matter, we are told that they are only "ephemeral"!

This may be in one sense. But practically it is quite a delusion. They are no more ephemeral than half the worthless productions of literature issued in the shape of books—indeed, far less so, for articles *must* conform to a certain standard, and at any rate reflect closely the life and thought of the day.

The above is sufficient to show that no man can be certain of obtaining all the information he requires without seeking in six different directions, and—having regard to the Division of State Papers—without having often to investigate twelve different sources of information, an impossible task.

It remains, therefore, to remedy this great evil. And it will never be remedied until we recognise the necessity of regarding each work in periodical and collected literature *as a book*, giving its full title as such, from the very first. Thanks to private enterprise, often unappreciated, in America and England, *Indexes* of a high character to periodical literature have been compiled. But there is yet much to be done in the matter. And there is no remedy short of the institution of complete series of separate Periodical and Continuous Authors' Catalogues, Class Catalogues, and Indexes, dealing first with the parts and then with the whole of the periodical literature contained in the journals of learned societies and in the magazines of the day.

With a perfect organisation, the same might be done for books buried in Collected-Works Series.

This done, it would then be possible to re-draft the lost

"books," into their proper channels in the main stream of literature, and one of the most necessary tasks in our National Bibliography would be an accomplished fact.

Intermuddling of National Literatures.

Another evil of Bibliography which I must protest against is the practice of one country meddling in the Bibliography of another, a most pernicious system which has resulted in the intermuddling of national literature.

There is no principle more sound and necessary than that *each country must perform its own Bibliography*; and that if it has a craving to undertake its neighbour's duties, at least it must first perform its own properly, and in any record it may choose to make, it must first record its own Literature *separately*, before mixing the record of it with that of other countries.

Of course the obvious theory of International Bibliography is the evolution from the unit to the aggregate, and yet we frequently find the principle of "Bibliography backwards" pursued here—men attempting to catalogue the literature of the world, before cataloguing the parts of it.

Obviously all such attempts must be failures. It is only the individual country which has the power and the opportunity to make a complete record of its own literature.

Re General Catalogue of English Literature.

Now, while I have been enumerating what I conceive to be some of the chief points in Bibliography which must engage our best efforts in the future, I am quite aware that the general subject has already been considered on several previous occasions in connection with the project of a

Catalogue of English Literature.

And it is because it has been seriously discussed that I wish to refer to it for one moment in order to provoke further discussion on a matter for which I will again ask your most serious consideration and attention.

Now I do not wish in any way unnecessarily to throw cold water on the project; but I do feel very strongly that the moment is premature for furthering the idea. After considerable study of the question, I can arrive at no other conclusion than that we are attempting a gigantic task without first sufficiently realising the necessary conditions of success.

I have stated before that each country must *first* (I lay great emphasis on the *first*) record its own Bibliography separately before there be any attempt at international incorporation of literature.

In view of the tremendous arrears of disordered Bibliography, I have urged the necessity of first staying the flow of disorder of *to-day*, and of thus dealing radically with the present before attempting to deal with the past.

In spite, however, of these apparent essentials, if I judge aright, the present intention in connection with a general catalogue of English literature is to commence a general attack on English literature, including the literature of the Australian Colonies and America. But I would urge that the conditions necessary for the success of such an effort do not yet exist.

Before a Catalogue of All English Literature worthy of the name can be compiled, it will be necessary for each of the English-speaking countries to compile separate catalogues of the literature actually originating in each country. And before this can be done, it will be necessary to investigate some very intricate problems in connection with the treatment of official documents which, especially in America, India, and the Colonies, contribute so largely to English literature.

It will be necessary, moreover, to reconsider the bibliographical treatment of the great section of periodical literature, a matter already alluded to, and one the importance of which cannot be exaggerated.

Now, at the present moment neither the official or the periodical literature of any country in the world has yet been catalogued, nor are there signs of any disposition to investigate the theories, a knowledge of which can alone render the attempt possible.

I do not question for one moment the possibility of obtaining records of an enormous mass of English literature within a comparatively short period of time. But I do most strongly assert that the machinery does not yet exist adequate for so great an enterprise, and that we have yet a great deal to learn before we rashly embark upon what can only be a huge experiment, certain to be a comparative failure, if it is to be judged by the essentials of completeness and certainty.

We are committing the great error of trying to conjure the "*whole*" into existence before the "*parts*" are complete—the old mistake of working backwards to the unit instead of forwards *from* the unit.

No! the proper method of procedure is to first get the Bibliography of each country into perfect working order before we attempt to combine the parts and incorporate the whole together.

And instead of dealing with all time, we should be content first to deal with single years until we are certain of our methods.

Let us quickly devise a system to deal with the *present*, commencing, perhaps, with the year 1895, and making all efforts to secure the institution of corresponding systems in America and the Colonies.

In two years we shall, then, at comparatively small expense and trouble, be able to exhibit a practical working system of Bibliography, and thus be able to remodel the past to the present.

And if this be not feasible—if we fail to devise a plan for introducing order into the literature of a single year to-day, it is very certain that we shall never succeed in attempting to evolve order when we attempt to deal with the *centuries*.

Conflicting Claims of Ancient and Modern Bibliography.

Finally, there is another difficulty of a different nature, which I would submit to your consideration, viz., the need for the reasonable adjustment of the conflicting claims of ancient and modern Bibliography in regard to the attention, time, and money support to be accorded to each.

It is quite possible for men to combine a real love and appreciation of all that is beautiful and of real interest in the old book-world with a practical appreciation also of the claims of Modern Bibliography. But is this always the case? It is by no means an unfounded complaint that the progress of modern Bibliography in the new world is held back by that of the old world, and that Bibliographers too often live in the past instead of living in the future. And this is a practical difficulty which yet remains to be solved. It appears certain that there is yet much of ancient bibliographical work to be done before Bibliographers are satisfied. But why should the *New Bibliography* suffer for the sins of the *Old*? Why is the failure of the past to prevent the success of the future?

Surely (and I trust the opinion of those present is with me), surely, the first duty which lies before us is at once to close the flood-gates of bibliographical disaster, and at once to concentrate all our energies on devising a system by which we can evolve

order out of chaos for to-day. When this is done, and we have got a well-organised system in proper working order, then is the time, and *then* only, to work backward and strive to remodel the Bibliography of the past time to that of to-day.

What, then, is the plan to be pursued ?

In answer, it is impossible to give the details in a paper such as this. But, as far as the main features are concerned, this must be the programme of the future.

PROGRAMME.

The Institution of :—

1. Training College for Librarians.
2. Fund in support of *Modern* Bibliographical research.
3. National Bibliographical Bureau, including :—
 - (a) Registration Branch.
 - (b) Special Bibliographies Branch.
 - (c) Periodical Literature Branch.
 - (d) Indexing Branch.
 - (e) International Bibliographical Branch.
 - (f) State-Papers Branch.
 - (g) Provincial and Municipal Official Literature Branch.

The establishment of such a Bureau corresponds, amongst other things, to the following work to be performed :—

General Literature.

- (a) The establishment of Compulsory Book-Registration.
- (b) The issues of complete Series of Periodical Special Bibliographies.
- (c i.) The issue of Annual Catalogues of articles contained in Publications of Learned Societies.
- (c ii.) The issue of Annual Catalogues (apart from Indexes) of the articles contained in the Magazines and Reviews, &c.
- (d) The issue of Series of Indexes according to the wants to be supplied.
- (e) The issue of International Lists, showing the annual contribution of this country to the literature of every other country.

Official Literature.

- (f i.) The issue of Annual Catalogues (not merely Indexes) of State Papers, both at Home and in the Colonies.
- (f ii.) The issue of *Continuous* Catalogues of the Home and Colonial State Papers from the year 1800.

(*fiii.*) The Issue of Special Catalogues of selected Areas and Subjects—*e.g.*, of the Official Documents relating :—To England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales separately. To each of the Colonies and India separately. To the Army and Navy. To Agriculture, Commerce, Labour, Education, Sanitation, &c., &c., &c.

(*g*) The issue of Catalogues of Official County and Municipal Literature.

CONCLUSION.

Such being the programme to be carried out, it remains to be considered how it can be best put into execution. I have stated my opinion and firm conviction, after much careful study of the matter, that the work can alone be satisfactorily performed by the State. But the programme alluded to involves a considerable expenditure of money, and of course no vote could reasonably be expected from Government until we are prepared to put forward definite proposals on the matter, supported by the opinion of the majority of librarians in the country. How, then, are we to proceed?

There are numerous agencies which might contribute to the solution of the problem. Of these, the two most prominent ones are the Library Association and the Bibliographical Society. The former Society, in addition to its immediate work, has rendered invaluable aid in the past to the cause of general Bibliography, a debt which can never be sufficiently acknowledged. But, of course, it has ever yet an all too formidable task in the administration and further promotion of the Free Library movement. The latter Society, fresh starting, has a great future before it. But it is a question open to fair debate, and a most momentous one, as to whether two Societies alone are sufficient to cope with the formidable task confronting us.

There are those who wonder whether it may not be necessary to look to the establishment of additional Special Societies, devoted exclusively to the development of *Modern Bibliography*, and pledged to the speedy special investigation of the several sections of it enumerated. It is very certain that there is more than enough work to occupy the energies, for many years to come, of the following auxiliary Societies, which, if formed, should meet together once a year in Annual Conference to report progress and discuss their work.

(*a*) A Society for the establishment of Compulsory Book-Registration.

(b) A Society for the investigation of Subject-Classification, and the work of compiling Periodical Special Bibliographies.

(c) A Society to investigate the Bibliography of Periodical Literature.

(d) An Index Society.

(e) An International Bibliographical Society.

(f) An Official State Papers Bibliographical Society.

(g) A County and Municipal Official Literature Society.

The above suggestions are, of course, obviously open to the cynical retort, "Get your societies."

But such a reply will be no proof against the desirability of their existence.

It may well be that the time will come when the need for so many societies will disappear. Very well, then. Let them vanish. When they have done their work, *then* they may lie down and die, but not till then.

I am quite aware of the natural objection to the multiplication of kindred societies. They are apt to lead to unnecessary divisions and unhappy rivalries in matters where Bibliographers should be prepared to meet one another half way to combine in one united effort.

But I see no other prospect of a due recognition of the claims of modern Bibliography except on these lines, where Bibliographers can combine to promote the development of the several branches in which they are most interested.

I shall, therefore, be most anxious to know what is the opinion of this meeting on the subject.

Whether, however, my suggestions may meet with approval or not, there is one thing certain, viz., that we are already half a century behind the times in Bibliography, and we are not moving fast enough.

In the year 1850, if we consult a most remarkable article in the *Athenæum* of that date, we shall find notice of a project, for which I have theoretically great respect, to form a Universal Printed Catalogue of the literature of the world.

In the year 1877, Mr. Cornelius Walford formally propounded before this Association the plan of a complete general catalogue of English literature, a project which has been considerably discussed of late. (And in the same year Mr. Henry Stevens suggested the establishment of a "National Clearing House.")

But we are no nearer the accomplishment of these projects than we were fifty or twenty years ago—in fact, we are rather

further off, because we have an additional fifty or twenty years' accumulation to deal with. And these two projects are only two of many others of even greater importance waiting to be carried out.

And why this want of progress?

Simply because we persist in trying to create the whole before we have formed the parts; and because we fail to recognise what an amount of theoretical and practical investigation of the subject is necessary before we can possibly be in a position to commence operations aright; because we have ignored the necessity for the institution of permanent *special* associations of Bibliographers to be responsible for the maintenance of such investigations; because we continue to delude ourselves that it is possible for private enterprise to carry out that which the State alone can perform; and because we expect that Bibliography will evolve itself without a preliminary expenditure of money.

We continue to build libraries and to accumulate books, but we have *not* paid sufficient attention to making books still more accessible for research. Our attention has been too exclusively concentrated on collections in particular libraries, to the neglect of the great annual national collection pouring from the press.

Moreover, we have become too contentedly accustomed to the idea of confusion, and have grown to regard it as a natural and a necessary evil.

But it is high time to rise and shake ourselves free from the trammels of past traditions.

We have roads and railways and rivers free of access to all. But the channels of *printed* thought communication are yet horribly blocked. It remains for us to clear them.

If the work is not to be performed as here suggested, *how* is it to be done? And *who* is to make the effort?

FRANK CAMPBELL.



